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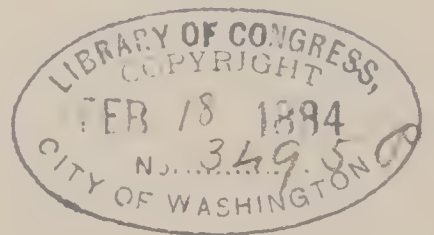




ONE OF THE SHEPHERDS OF  
BETHLEHEM.

A Poem.

*Reuben - Bethlehem, - 1883*



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## ONE OF THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM.

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LONE amid the mountains,  
Afar from city and sea,  
This vision of the shepherd  
One evening came to me,

Adoring, wondering, kneeling,  
In the stable at Christ's feet :  
All that his heart was saying,  
I now to you repeat.

### THE SHEPHERD.

Helpless in this manger lying,  
Canst thou be the Child Divine ?  
In the watches of the night,  
As we kept our flocks in ward,





*ONE OF THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM.*

Lo ! around us God's great glory,  
With exceeding light, did shine ;  
And an angel, swiftly flying,  
Came upon our sore affright,  
Telling us this wondrous story :—  
“ Fear not,” said he, from the sky  
Swift alighting, drawing nigh ;  
“ Tidings glad to you I bring ;  
Joy to all the earth I sing ;  
Unto you this day is born  
Christ the Saviour, Christ the Lord !  
Ye shall know the tidings true  
By this sign I give to you :  
Seeking Bethlehem ere the dawn  
Groweth to another morn,  
In a lowly manger laid,  
And in swaddling-clothes arrayed,  
Ye shall find the child displayed.”

Then suddenly, as the angel  
Ended thus his glad evangel,  
All the bliss of paradise  
Shining in his deathless eyes,



*ONE OF THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM.*

Swift and still as sunbeams thrilling  
All the hushed and breathless sky,  
Gliding throngs of angels bright,  
From aerial spaces dim,  
Dawned upon our wondering sight ;  
Borne on pinions strong and fair,  
Cherubim and seraphim,  
Shining, hovering in the air;  
Kindled deeper glory there ;  
While above us, in the height,  
Beamed serene a crystal light, —  
A pure radiance, calm and white.

Then a silence from on high  
Held the voices of the sky,  
Till, o'erflowing as the sea,  
Wave on wave of melody,  
Every angel, in his part,  
Poured the rapture of his heart ;  
Shrined beneath o'erarching wing,  
Slowly circling, they did sing ;  
Star-like in each forehead shone  
Living light, from God alone.



*ONE OF THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM.*

Oh ! their solemn, soaring cry, —  
“Glory be to God on high !”  
Oh ! the depths that in reply  
Sounded, “Peace on earth to men !”  
Then the host made heaven ring,  
Singing once, and yet again,  
“Glory be to God ! Amen !”

Softly as in sunny air  
Snowflakes die, dissolving there ;  
So, in distance past our sight,  
Melting in the radiant height,  
Died their last faint notes in light,  
As they sought their native home,  
Vanishing within the dome.  
Then the night seemed so forlorn,  
Their melodious brightness gone,  
We came to seek thee, half afraid  
Only a dream to us had said,  
“In David’s ancient city laid,  
We should find the child displayed.”



ONE OF THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM.

Ere the chorus shone in heaven,  
I surely heard the angel say,  
“ *To you* a child is born to-day :  
A Saviour *unto you* is given ! ”  
O baby ! art thou born to me ?  
Henceforth my inmost heart shall be  
Thy slave, to gladly worship thee.  
O human child ! O Child Divine !  
Art thou a Saviour ? Art thou mine, —  
*Mine*, whom herald angels sang, —  
*Mine*, for whom the heavens rang,  
As for God’s own son and heir,  
Fit rejoicing to prepare ?  
Never more can I repine :  
Thou art mine, forever mine !

In our sacred writings’ fold  
Live the secrets God doth hold ;  
As I studied the letters old,  
Forth would blessèd visions sweeping,  
Swiftly pass, and leave me weeping ;  
Often the face of a little child,  
With shining eyes that beamed in mine





*ONE OF THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM.*

A loving tenderness like thine,  
Seemed from the roll to look, and smiled.

Once, on the yearly atonement day,  
In the temple's court, the trumpet's clang  
Shrill and triumphant loudly rang,  
Proclaiming the year of jubilee,  
When all from bondage were released :  
After the blare of the trumpet ceased,  
The chosen kid was forward led ;  
Confessing all our sins, the priest  
Laid them upon its sinless head ;  
To pathless deserts far away  
They led him, where no man might stay ;  
Our sins forever thus he bore  
Where they could threaten us no more.

Then Israel sang, and bowed the knee ;  
And the priest from our sacred writings read  
These words by the prophet Esaias said : —  
“ Israel, hear ! this sign receive ;  
That God with man on earth shall dwell,



ONE OF THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM.

Behold ! a virgin shall conceive,  
And bear a son, — ‘ *Emanuel !* ’ ” <sup>1</sup>

“ For unto us a child is born,  
And unto us a son is given ;  
Justice and judgment shall adorn  
His throne, established and secure ;  
His holy name  
I here proclaim,  
The mighty God of earth and heaven !  
The Wonderful ! the Counsellor !  
The Father who can never err !  
His kingdom shall supreme endure ;  
And his dominion, Prince of peace,  
Through endless ages shall increase.”

Then, or ever the priest read farther,  
By the way of the gate that looketh east,  
Flooding the court of the holy place  
Came the glory of God, like a river ;  
And still the splendor mild increased,  
When lo ! within the marvellous light

<sup>1</sup> *Emanuel* means *God with us*.



*ONE OF THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM.*

Appeared, as in some blessèd dream,  
A holy vision to my sight : —  
I saw, as the wings of cherubim  
Over a golden mercy-seat ;  
And on the seat a little child  
With eyes that seemed like God's own grace,  
Looked down upon us all, and smiled ;  
And the mercy-seat looked wan and dim,  
And pale the glowing cherubim,  
Before the joy that beamed from him ;  
And all the glory round him shone  
As if it rayed from him alone.  
His hand upbore a crystal cup,  
In which the wine was brimming up ;  
And the raiment white of the Child Divine  
Was sprinkled with drops of the blood-red wine.

Then passed the vision, but it wore  
Thy likeness ! Kneeling at thy feet  
Thou dost his radiant smile repeat ;  
Thou, living, breathing, dost restore  
The eyes that paled the cherubim,  
And made the mercy-seat look dim.



ONE OF THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM.

The angel called thee "Christ *the Lord!*"  
Where lie the lands that thou dost own?  
This stable poorly doth accord  
With titles such as he made known.  
What art thou Lord of? Of my heart?  
Yes, Holy Child! thou art! thou art!

---

The vision now was changing :  
Receding in the night,  
The stable and the manger  
Passed swiftly from my sight ;  
Returning in the starlight,  
I saw the shepherd tread ;  
And, full of awe and gladness,  
His sheep again he led.

Guarding his flock, the shepherd went,  
Upon the Holy Babe intent ;  
As in a manger rude and wild,  
Within his heart he bore the Child ;  
And less to earth, and more to heaven,  
His daily thought and care were given ;





*ONE OF THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM.*

And now, as o'er his roll he bent,  
The Child so human, so divine,  
Illumined all the manuscript ;  
And prophecies fulfilled, he knew,  
In that most Holy One, now drew  
A glory fresh from meaning true.  
Nor seldom, filled with happy awe,  
With musing eyelids closed, he saw  
Again, in memory's heaven dim,  
The cherubim and seraphim  
Chanting their own melodious hymn.

The shepherd's heart, once fierce and wild,  
Grew pure and peaceful, meek and mild,  
Like the most Holy, Holy Child,  
Till down the sky an angel trod,  
With darkness veiled, with silence shod,  
And bore him to the heart of God.

But ere my vision ended,  
Behold ! around the throne,  
Singing as he ascended,  
The host of heaven shone !



ONE OF THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM.

Their joyful praises pealing,  
Awoke me, and they ceased,  
While over me came stealing  
A splendor from the East.

And bells, the bells of morning,  
Were sounding in the skies ;  
And Christmas Day was dawning,  
And bidding me "*Arise !*"

O Shepherd ! on that shining night  
Thou sawest him, the "Light of light,"  
The Babe of Bethlehem, the King  
Who doth our hearts renew, and bring  
Adoring at his feet to sing !  
I envy not that unto thee  
Was given the Holy Child to see,  
Jesus ! who came for thee and me ;  
Nor, that I see him not, will grieve ;  
I shall behold him ! and my brow  
His blessing crowneth, even now :  
"Blessèd are they,"  
I hear him say,



*ONE OF THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM.*

“Who have not seen me, yet believe.”

My faith this blessing doth receive.

My Lord ! my Life ! my Joy ! my Light !

These songs that sing to me by night,

These voices, and these visions bright,

Thou givest, thou ! my heart's delight.

O Christ ! thy kingdom hath increased ;

The praise of angels hath not ceased ;

And the sweetest song in heaven or earth

Is still the story of thy birth.





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